



Patron Feedback on Montana Public Computer Centers

Fact Sheet

Background

Over 200 library patrons participated in a voluntary, anonymous, online survey to assist public libraries with improving the patron-Internet experience. In an effort to learn more about how patrons address their information needs through the use of public computers, Montana State Library hosted the online survey for 60 days; each question in the survey was optional. The survey was an opt-in activity and was promoted by using a combination of pop-up windows on public access computers as well as hyperlinks on public library websites asking patrons if they would like to answer questions about their computer experience. 253 patrons participated.

Participating Libraries

Patrons reported using public computers in nine specific libraries. Forty-three respondents did not identify their primary public library and are represented as “unknown.” The greatest number of patron responses came from Parmly Billings Library, followed by Bozeman Public Library. Libraries in smaller communities such as Ronan, Eureka, Libby, and Troy were also represented.

Figure One: Patron responses by library

n=209

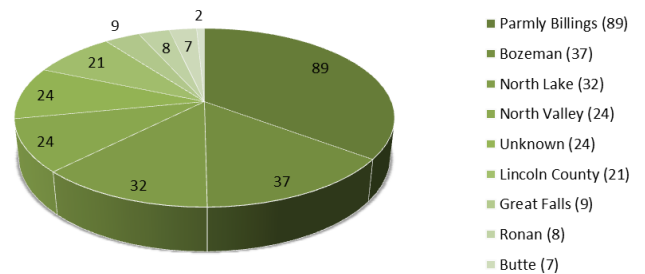
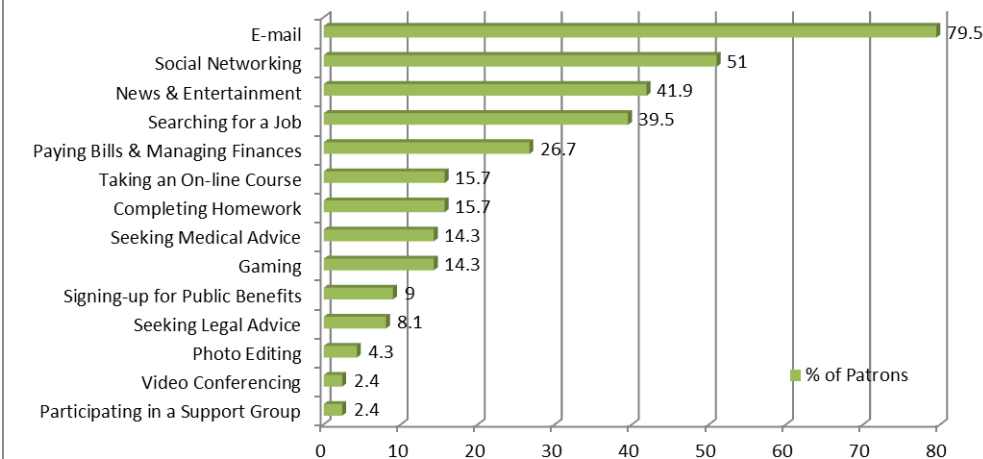


Figure Two: Most popular content accessed by patrons

n=210



Internet Content Accessed

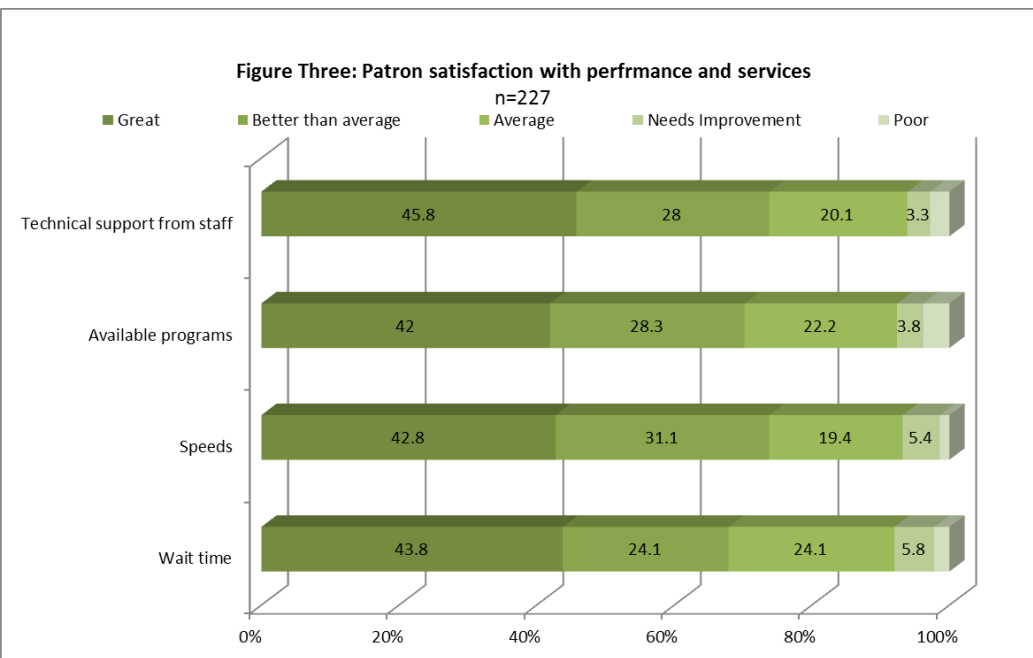
Survey results show that patrons access a variety of content from public library computers. The most commonly accessed content is e-mail, followed by social networking, news and entertainment, job-searching, and financial tools for online bill paying and personal finances. Patrons also reported a variety of other content by responding to an open-ended question. This included: general research, housing searches, shopping, accessing library catalogues and databases, fundraising and grant-writing

research, watching TV, photo editing, auto-restoration, making travel arrangements, managing a volunteer group, on-line education software, and working from the library.

Patron Satisfaction

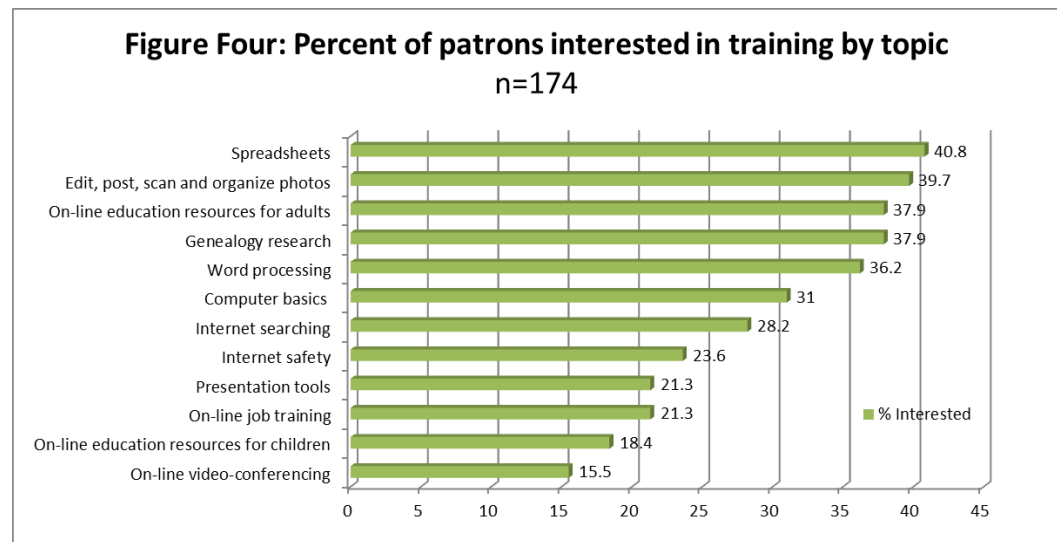
Patrons are generally very pleased with technical support from library staff, browsing speeds, wait times and available programs. Approximately 70% of patrons rate all services as “better than average” or “great.” That being said, several patrons gave suggestions on how services could be improved, including: designation of a quiet area, more space in cubicles for paperwork, smaller headphones for children, extended time limits, expanded time limits when there is no one waiting, ability to go to any website without filtering, expanding library and computer center hours, more

instructional classes, allowing booting from a USB drive, offering more plug-ins for laptops and devices, and devoting some computers for 10 minute use without requiring sign-up and reservation.



Training Needs and Interest

While many patrons are able to receive one-on-one technical assistance from library staff, survey results indicate several training topics patrons would like the library to host. Those include workshops on: spreadsheets, photo editing and management, online education resources, genealogy research, word processing, computer basics, Internet searching and safety, presentation tools, job-searching tools, and on-line video-conferencing.



Patron Success Stories & Quotes

Access to on-line banking has saved me money.

I found information to repair 1935 and 1956 outboard engines and many, many useful items to help in daily life.

I found a job that I absolutely love after a long time searching for work.

I completed a degree online using the Wi-Fi access and my own laptop.

I have been able to keep in touch with my family and friends across the country and around the world from the library.

I work from home using my home computer, but sometimes use the library as an off-site office.

I loved doing foundation research on your system; that was very successful!

I'm visiting from out-of-town because my mother had a stroke. She doesn't have a computer but I'm remotely running my own woman-owned small business from the library while I'm caring for her.

I found my relatives from Yugoslavia, which I had never had contact with and tried for years to find.

I love being able to share current pictures with my family and friends all over the world.

I got a job!

I used Lexis-Nexis, and my research resulted in winning a federal civil rights case.



For more information on activities sponsored by the Montana State Library to improve Internet access at public libraries, visit www.msl.mt.gov/btop.